

# 65. THE WORLD AND RELATIONS WITH THE WORLD

## Summary:

1. Lexicography and semantics. – 2. The world as the creative and redemptive work of God. – 3. "Have nothing to do with the world". 3.1. What is the "world"? 3.2. "Who is like God?". – The absoluteness or centrality of God. 3.3. "Those who live according to the spirit of the world". 3.4. The Brother and the world. 3.4.1. The call to abandon the world – the option and the reality; its meaning, motives and advantages. 3.4.2. A ministerial perspective and the world. 3.4.3. To be worthy ministers of the Gospel and not of the world. 3.5. The pupil in the Christian school and in the world. 3.5.1. A positive perspective. 3.5.2. To live "in" the world without being "of" the world. 3.5.3. Citizens of the world from a Christian perspective. – 4. The experience of the first Brothers with regard to the world. 4.1. Immersed in the world and yet distant from it at the same time. 4.2. A focus of persecution for some of those in the world. 4.3. The attraction of the spirit of the world. – 5. Contempt for the world in the time of De La Salle. 5.1. A constant feature. 5.2. De La Salle's concern and a modern perspective.

## 1. LEXICOGRAPHY AND SEMANTICS

1.1. "In this context the word which De La Salle makes most use of in his written work is the word "world" (cf. VL "monde") which is used 782 times throughout his writings without counting other words which are similar in meaning, such as "mondain" (26 times), "mondanité" (1) or "siècle" (97). With this frequency of usage it occupies the 34th position in the list of the words most used by De La Salle and the 22nd position if only nouns and adjectives are counted. It is to be found in almost all of his written works with the following frequency: Da 84 times; Db 60; Dc 64; E 5; EM 38; GA 39; I 37; L 18; MD 109; MF 200; MH 4; MR 16; PA 36; R 33; RB 32; RC 6; RD 1.

1.2. He does not use the "world" univocally and hence one can find different meanings attributed to it; for example:

A) As a simple *element in a linguistic expression* as, for example, in: "The effect and the merits... of Jesus Christ are far from being overshadowed and by no manner of means ("ou le moins du monde") are they diminished by our offences" (Da 326).

B) It carries the sense of "everybody" (all, or all the people, all the inhabitants of the earth) in the French expression "tout le monde", as in the following examples: "The Pharisees seduce everybody" (Da 40); Jesus "... invites all to offer the

holy sacrifice of the Mass" ("il invite tout le monde" (Dc 63); "... I will act in such a way that everything will turn out well and everybody ("tout le monde") will be happy" (L 40,4); "everybody ("tout le monde") has defects which they take wherever they go" (MD 74,2); "Jesus withheld his exterior offering until he could make it on the tree of the Cross in the sight of all ("à la vue de tout le monde") (MF 104,2). The word is used some 75 times in this way.

C) In De La Salle's language the word "world" also carries the meaning of *all that God has created*. There are passages in which the word "world" is used with reference to the cosmos (a word which he never uses) in the sense of the totality of space which embraces the creative work of God. At other times it is used specifically in the sense of the "earth", the immediate geographical location inhabited by people and where their multifarious activities unfold.

The cosmic meaning of "world" appears particularly in the catechetical works of De La Salle such as "The Duties of a Christian" (Da, Db, Dc), and in the corresponding summaries (GA and PA), in contexts such as creation, the Church, the Providence of God, the end of the world, or judgement. In his other works the use of this cosmic sense of "world" is rare (cf. MD 46,1; MF 175,1) sometimes in the sense of creation, of the end of the world (MF 178,3; R 216,18; RB 131).

D) Sometimes De La Salle uses the term "world" to indicate the existential moment or the here-and-now; it is the existential space which envelops the life of man. Moreover, in many passages it express a contrast, for example, between "this life" and "the other life" or between "here" and "beyond". However, in many of these passages the word can be understood both in the "spatial" sense of "world=earth" and in the temporal sense of "world=the time of human life".

E) The word is also used to describe the type of life lived by those *who are not consecrated to God in priestly or religious life* — that is by those who "live in the world". In contrast to these people, the Brother, among others, "has abandoned the world", "has retired" or "distanced himself"

from it in order to consecrate himself entirely to God, forming community with other Brothers to contribute to the salvific plan of God through the ministry of the school. However, the majority of people live their lives in "the world". It is there where they must "know, love and serve God" living the "Gospel maxims" and the "Christian spirit". If the Brother withdraws from the world and forms a community it is precisely in order to return to it since it is the world of his pupils, especially of the poorest who are most in need of salvation, and he returns to it filled with God and with the spirit of faith and zeal thereby making the salvation of God a reality.

F) Finally, in his writings, the "world" signifies a combination of attitudes, mentalities and behaviour which are *in opposition to those of the Gospel*. For De La Salle, these attitudes, mentalities and behaviour were not abstractions — they were operative in the "people of the world" who were obdurate and blind with regard to God since they were preoccupied with the vanities and the superficialities of the world. These were people who "lived according to the spirit of the world". One should note that, for De La Salle, the most disturbing aspect of this spirit was that it was active, influential and combative. It was expressed primarily in the lives of those dominated by it in the form of attitudes and behaviour which were in opposition to the Gospel and to the following of Jesus. Moreover, it operated as a principle of evil with regard to others and, as such, it was a principle which was alive and active — it was an environment of sin in which criteria and values have been corrupted by the spirit of the world and its maxims. De La Salle alludes to this when he speaks of concupiscence — the world, the devil and the flesh — and forcefully invites one to distance oneself from it and to refrain from regular contact with those who live these values in order to guard against its influence. However, it is not sufficient simply to guard against its influence — one must actively adopt a counter attitude by living Gospel values and acting consistently with them as well as having a horror and contempt for the world. One must live this way in spite of the opposition and the struggles which worldly people unfailingly create for those who seek to challenge

their worldly manner of interpreting life. The assimilation of a way of living "according to the new man" in Christ is a fundamental task of the Christian school. The Brother carries this out by means of appropriate teaching but it is also important that, in an exemplary manner, he lives and witnesses to what "a disciple of Jesus" should be and that he exercises the functions of his ministry zealously thereby touching the hearts of his pupils.

## 2. THE WORLD AS THE CREATIVE AND REDEPTIVE WORK OF GOD

2.1. The world is, above all, the creation of God and the work of his omnipotence. It has been created by the Father with the Son and the Holy Spirit (Db 25). While he could have created it in a moment, God took his time — six days — so as to create his creatures with order and wisdom (Da 19; Db 26; GA 320) ... "What do we normally call all that God has created? It is called the world" (Db 25; GA 320). The creation of the world marks the *beginning of time* (Db 25+). The angels and man appear in this creative work of God as the highest form of creatures and the most worthy of respect (Da 19). Man is a rational being made up of body and soul, created in the image of God and, as such, his principal task lies in knowing and loving God (Da 19). God created the world *for his own glory and to make his omnipotence known*. This might appear to portray a God who is autonomous, distant and totally "other" but, in the vision of De La Salle, this is balanced by another perspective which is that God also created the world *out of love for his creatures* (Db 26).

2.2. There are many references which enable us to capture *the perspective of hope* through which De La Salle contemplated the cosmos and the world:

2.2.1. While our eyes are only capable of capturing the sensible, alone through which they do not see, God is present in everything in its nature giving it its being and substance (Da 16; Db 26). God sees everything and he knows exactly what happens in the world (Da 16) so that nothing escapes his vision or his loving concern (cf. EM 6+; 12+; CAMPOS, M.-SAUVAGE, M., CL, 50; pp. 199+;

224+). The protection of God hovers over all people. From the beginning of the world until its end each person has been given the protection of an angel (Da 21) and, consequently, they are wisely guided and directed by God who is infinitely wise and also infinitely good; he wishes that all people be saved and know the truth (DA 316).

2.2.2. It was *sin* which brought unhappiness to man, putting him beyond grace and beyond the love of God which is true happiness, as well as sowing the seeds of further unhappiness in man through the consequences, pains and miseries of sin (Da 19.23.163). The consequences of sin were the corruption of nature and the inclination to sin which erased almost all the life-giving characteristics which were rooted in the commandments in man's heart (Da 104).

2.2.3. The centring and *the happiness of man* lies in his orientation towards God (da 19) who is the goal of his restlessness (St Augustine, Confessions I.1.1: MF 125,3). This fundamental orientation has been placed in the heart of man since the beginning of the world (Da 104).

2.2.4. The coming of Jesus Christ has meant that the world *rediscovered the way of its salvation in the reordering of the salvific and redemptive plan of God* (Da 25). Basing himself on the Gospel of John, De La Salle makes many references to Jesus as the "light of the world" (cf. Jn 1; 3,19; 8,12; 9,5; 12,4,6...). In his catechetical works he never misses an opportunity to enable the young Christian in the school to grasp the rich symbolism underlying, for example, the triangular wax candle (Dc 61), or of the Paschal candle which is lit on Holy Saturday (Da 62), or the use of candles during the Benedictus, the Magnificat or the Nunc Dimittis (Dc 63+), or the candles used in the procession on the feast of the Presentation (Dc 152). They are symbols of Jesus Christ who is the "light of the world".

— Why is there a new fire and completely new light in the Church on Holy Saturday?

— To indicate to us that the Light of the Church, Jesus Christ, which had been extinguished from our eyes with his death on Good Friday, has been re-lit and has begun again to shine brilliantly in his resurrection.

— Why is the light of Christ represented in the putting on of the Church lights and in the lighting of the candles?

— It is to indicate us: 1. That Jesus Christ is the only source of all light which illumines all who come into the world. 2. That we must not turn to any other light than to the light of Jesus which must guide us on our way to heaven.

— Why is a triangular form of candle used and what is the meaning of its three sides?

— This candle represents the three persons in God from whom the light of Jesus emerges and which he communicates to all who live in the world.

— What must the faithful who assist at the Office of Holy Saturday do while the triangular candle is lit and while the Paschal candle is being blessed?

— They must do three things: 1. Recognise that Jesus Christ is their true light. 2. Adore him as such. 3. Dispose themselves to receive him and to follow him in all their actions" (Dc 61+; cf. also I 95,266).

This same starting-point of the Johannine image of Christ as the Light of the world is used by De La Salle in some of his meditations (for example, in Md 44,1; MF 164,1; 192,2) but this is not to create the impression of personal redemption or salvation exclusive to the Brother. His is not an abstract doctrine but rather it is fruit of joyful experience as much for himself as for his disciples (cf. AEP, 61-63):

"God, who diffuses the fragrance of his teaching in the world through human ministers, and who commanded: 'Enlighten the darkness', is the one who has kindled a light in the hearts (2 Co 4,6) of those whom He chose to announce his word to children in order to enlighten them by making the glory of God known to them..." (MR 193,1).

"You must constantly ask Jesus Christ that all the instruction which you give to them is inspired by his Spirit and made efficacious by Him in such a way that just as it is He who enlightens all men who come into this world (Jn 1,9) so He will also be the one who enlightens the spirit of Your disciples and encourages them to love and put into practice all that you teach them" (MR 195,3).

(We have preferred the symbolic image of the light of the world to other images of Jesus Christ such as mediator between God and man, or as Redeemer and Saviour of the world. In any event these may be seen in Da 46,62; Dc 188+, 195; EM 75, 92; I 48, 66, 267, 268).

2.2.5. Various expressions used by De La Salle with reference to the world as creation and redemption have a special resonance in Lasallian teaching. Such expressions, which may appear more doctrinal and removed from experience or which reflect aspects of God appropriate to his divine essence, emerge with the vividness of experience in other Lasallian contexts. In these latter expressions one senses the God of salvation who is present and active in history. Thus, for example;

1. "God who creates his creatures with order and wisdom..." and with time (Da 19; Db 26; GA 320); God who wisely guides and directs creatures (GA 316). Very similar expressions are used by De La Salle in the "Memoir of the Beginnings" with reference to the action of God in his own foundational history:

"God, who guides all things gently and with wisdom and who is not accustomed to force the will of man, wishing that I give myself entirely to the work of the schools, did so in a very imperceptible manner and over a short period of time in such a way that one commitment led me to another without my having foreseen it at the beginning..." (BER 33; MAC 10; MAR 14; cf. AEP 19-20; CAMPOS, M., *The Gospel Journey...* 1, 96-108).

2. "God who is infinitely good wished that all be saved and brought to the knowledge of the truth". In the context of the creative work of God this affirmation is presented without qualification. MR 193,1 attempts to flesh out a practically identical text drawn in part from 1 Tim 2,4: "... God is so good that, once having created man, he desired that all should come to the knowledge of the truth..." (193,1); "... Not only does God wish that all come to the knowledge of truth; he also wishes that all be saved" (MR 193,3). De La Salle leads one to see how the providence of God has manifested itself in the creation of the Christian schools as a remedy for the abandonment of many children (MR 193,2; 194,1; RC 1,4-6).

3. "... they will have an angel to protect them" (Da 21). De La Salle transfers the angelic symbolism to the educator of youth and applies a ministerial function to it: "...Those chosen by Providence to educate children must exercise the function of Guardian Angels with them in their work..."

(MR 197) while the subsequent meditation has, as its title, "... How the educator of youth exercises the function of Guardian Angel" (MR 198).

### 3. "... HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH THE WORLD" (I 82)

3.1. What is the "world"? De La Salle defines his understanding of it in the "Duties of a Christian" (CL 20) which was directed more at catechists and other adults (CL 20, 111, n. 1) and which is paralleled in two other smaller works produced in the form of questions and answers directed more specifically at pupils (GA, PA: CL 23). The definition of "world" appears in the context of the Sacrament of Confirmation which "confers the fullness of the Holy Spirit" (Da 231) and "gives sufficient strength in order to overcome anything opposed to our salvation" (Da 233). However, it happens that even though we are trying to live faithfully, "the bad Christians among whom we live" continually endeavour to make us "renounce Jesus Christ by all means..." which not even the tyrants who persecuted the early Christians did (Da 233). The "three enemies" that are opposed to our salvation are the devil, the world and the flesh..." (Da 233).

"By the "world" is meant those people who live according to the spirit of the world as well as everything that is in people that might lead them into sin along with the desire we have to be in the world, living its attractions and vanities" (Da 234). It is clear that De La Salle is not philosophising on the cosmos nor considering the realities of the world. His concern is salvation and attachment to Jesus Christ. Thus, in this context, the meaning of "world" is anything which is opposed to our salvation. One notes, too, that the "world" is not an abstract entity but rather that it refers to something very concrete, tangible and experiential. It refers to flesh and blood people who live in a particular manner as well as to that which may lead us into sin and the desire within us which leads us into the pursuit of worldly appearances, attractions and vanities.

### 3.2. "Who is like God?"

(the absoluteness or centrality of God)

3.2.1. indicates that man is "in this world to love God" (Da 96) and that "salvation is the most important preoccupation we have in this world" (Da 284) since "God has brought us into this world for no other purpose than that we save ourselves" (Da 431; EM 112+).

The "first and principal occupation must be to know and love God since that is why we are in the world" (Da 21); "... all that Christians must do in this world to ensure their salvation can be reduced to loving God..." (Da 90). It is "important to love God with one's whole heart... without giving space to anything else..." (Da 94); "... one must not divide one's heart between God and the world, between God and creatures... (He) cannot tolerate it... Obviously, we are permitted to love creatures and things in the world but only in relation to God..." (Da 94).

3.2.2. This conceptual framework plays a dominant role in De La Salle's teaching. It is present with the same force whether dealing with the pupil in the school, whom he wishes to correctly set on the path of life, or with the Brother living in community who is consecrated to the God of salvation from whom he has received the mission to bring the Christian spirit to life. To present his thought more clearly De La Salle makes use of the language of opposition and confrontation; thus we find many examples such as interior/exterior, heaven/earth, world/God, spiritual/human, earth-creatures-things of the world/God. The effect is to create the impression that, within De La Salle a basic dualism operated with respect to reality along with a profound pessimism with regard to the world and to man. It is very probable that this is not what De La Salle intended to convey even if our modern sensibility perceives it as such;

"We must love God, says Our Lord, with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind and with all our strength. To love God with all our heart is to love him with all our affection, without any reserve and without having a place in our heart for anything else other than God who must entirely possess

it... We cannot seek, then, to divide our heart between God and the world and to give our heart to God and to creatures; this division will cause injury to God who cannot tolerate it. Obviously, we are permitted to love creatures and things in the world but only in relation to God; it is not then a question of loving the creature but rather of loving God in the creature" (Da 94; cf. also Da 74. 95+).

3.2.3. *This language of irreconcilability is frequent in De La Salle: for example,*

"God and the world, the spirit of God and the spirit of the world, are not reconcilable, as Jesus Christ says in the Gospel (Mt 6,24); in consequence he adds that if one possesses one of these the other cannot be possessed: (MF 174,3).

"Communicating with the world leads one eventually to take on its spirit which is opposed to the spirit of Jesus Christ and, since both cannot exist in a soul at the same time, one loses the power of the spirit of Jesus Christ in filling oneself with the worldly spirit" (MF 182,1).

"At the same time we ask this Saint (St Michael the Archangel) to inspire us with a horror of the world — which seeks to supplant God in our hearts — and to rid our minds of all worldly ideas by making use of those fulminating words which he uttered in the battle against Lucifer: 'Who is like God?'" (MF 125,2).

"If you are truly of God you will be enemies of the world — and the world will be your enemy because you are of God" (MD 41,2). Examples such as these could be multiplied.

3.2.4. Apart from this central nucleus De La Salle makes use of many derivations of a practical order; for example, "... under the influence of things of this world according to which they are exteriorly...", "esteem them for what they are in God" (EM 13); "... Don't preoccupy yourself with pleasing those in the world and don't leave anything undone to please them..." (MD 75,2); "... to overcome all earthly considerations so as to consecrate yourself to God"; "... complete detachment from the things of the earth... since they are nothing and God is everything" (MF 125,2,3); "... empty the heart of the earthly..." (MF 171,1); "... far from grieving about it (the persecution of the devil and the world) be thankful that you are at war with them..." (MF 182,2); "... even consider yourselves as dead to the world... and don't have any communication with it..."; "... treat it, then as it is (as an enemy); abhor contact with it and do

not allow it the least access..." (MD 41,2); "... love poverty and live detached from everything" (MF 173,2); "... you should certainly consider it a great happiness to have left the world... do not fall back into becoming fond of what you once left" (MF 174,2,3).

On more than one occasion one notices De La Salle's tendency to adopt literally what he calls "Gospel maxims". Thus, for example, "no one can serve two masters" (Mt 6,24), or "rejoice, then, when the world hates you" (Mt 5,11+), or "if you wish to be perfect leave everything you have" (Mt 19,21).

### 3.3. "Those who live according to the spirit of the world"

3.3.1. One of the elements in De La Salle's definition of the world is "those who live according to the spirit of the world" (Da 234). "Les gens du monde" and "les gens du siècle" are much-used expressions by De La Salle — occasionally in his catechetical and pedagogical writing but much more in his spiritual-ministerial writing. At times he uses expressions such as "bad Christians", "worldlings" and "libertines" without attempting to nuance their meanings which would be brought out by a more detailed study of their contexts. These expressions refer to people who, in their daily lives, think, decide and act "according to the spirit of the world".

In schematic form the words "spirit" or "maxims" approximate to-day to what would be called "criteria", "values", "value judgements", or "hierarchy of values". All of these constitute the "attitudes" or the "mentality" which is the base from which a person thinks, acts, prioritizes and organizes life. These criteria are expressed in behaviour, or in "practices" or "conduct" in De La Salle's terminology. According to De La Salle, the world is divided into those who live their lives according to the spirit of the Gospel (which is the Christian spirit) and those who live according to the spirit of the world.

#### 3.3.2. *What characterizes the world and those who live according to its spirit?*

— Ignorance of Jesus Christ, the mystery of salvation (MF 165,1; 194,2); a lack of insight and

ability with regard to what refers to God and his service (MD 32,1); a very imperfect knowledge of God which leads one not to think about God, not to speak of him nor to appreciate him being spoken of, to pray haphazardly (MD 41,3); the impossibility of those given to concupiscence to receive the Spirit of God (MD 42,1; MD 44,3).

— The cult of the external, of appearances, of the superficial (EM 105; MD 34,13; MD 75,2; MF 85,1).

— The love of riches (MF 143,2).

— A life of complacency in which the senses are gratified (MD 41,3).

— A world of sins covered at times by a tissue of wisdom but blind to the criteria of God and in which maxims are professed and lived which are opposed to those taught by the Spirit of God to holy souls (MR 194,2; Da 168,16; MD 44,3; Db 164,16).

— Close association with the devil (MD 41,1; Dc 75-83).

— Love of those who love the world and have the same habits (MD 41,3; MF 182,2).

— Declared opposition to Jesus Christ (MF 182,3); hatred of the servants of God; scorn, oppression, injuries, slander with regard to them (MD 75,2; MD 41,1. 2. 3.).

— It could be described as a "corrupt world" (MF 182,1).

Consequently, it is not surprising that De La Salle says that "the habits and views of the people of the world are diametrically opposed to those which you (the Brothers) must adopt" (MD 75,2) and that, after interpreting the world from this perspective, he describes it at a stroke as "a stormy sea" (MF 164,1) and reiterates his invitations to distance oneself from it and from its evil out of fear of being corrupted by the worldly spirit.

3.3.3. *But is the whole of society like this?* De La Salle does not nuance his affirmations too much with the result that they sound rather too generalized. He is concerned to describe a particular type against which he wants to put one on guard; and it is as much for Brother as for pupils since it involves attitudes which are clearly anti-Gospel. He is not attempting to sketch a sociological study. He is more interested in discerning and describing "spi-

rits" than in quantifying percentages. His desire is that "the new man" be a reality in the heart of the Brother and that the "Christian spirit" strengthens and grows in the heart of the pupil for it is then that the saving plan of God, which is the key objective in Lasallian teaching, is realized.

As nuancing elements to this overly-negative impression one could cite as examples, his repeated allusions to what characterizes the "good Christian" which appears in question-and-answer form in the "Duties of a Christian" in such questions as "... How should a good Christian behave during Christmas?..." or during "carnival" or in "Lent". De La Salle was very concerned that the exemplary character of the teacher be a first-class educational influence and he was, without doubt, aiming these questions at concrete situations and people who were animated by the "Christian spirit" and who were as real as those people who allowed themselves to be led by the spirit of the world. One could also mention, in the same context, the admiration which De La Salle had for those who in their childhood benefited from a strong Christian education. When we bear in mind the situation of those far from salvation, which was to be the origin of the Christian schools, we can be sure that the admiration alluded to did not simply remain confined to the biographies of sanctity (cf. MF 98,1; MF 122,1; MF 177,1; MF 189,2; MF 186,1). It would also be important to refer to the effects of the Christian schools about which De La Salle comments in MR 207,2. 3 and MR 208.

### 3.4. The Brother and the world

3.4.1. *The call to abandon the world – the option and the reality: its meaning, motives and advantages.*

A. To "leave" or to "abandon" the world, to "withdraw" or "separate oneself" from the world, are expressions which De La Salle uses in the main to describe a particular situation. It was language current in his time to indicate the option for the religious or priestly life. De La Salle also applies it many times to the lives of the saints or to the life of the Brother in general. At times, too, these expressions carry spiritual or ascetical overtones proposed as tasks to be accomplished.

B. De La Salle views the life of the Brother as a total unity in which personal salvation and the exercise of the ministry of salvation with those who have been confided to their care are the tasks that are incumbent on him in this life. At times the two aspects are presented as inseparable as, for example, in "... Do not make any distinction..." (R 184,4) (cf. GALLEGO S., Vol 2, 27-32) while, at other times, he focuses on one or other aspect with the consequent danger that the total picture is not seen. This is even more frequent with regard to the theme of the "world" with the result that the risk of dissociation or distortion is all the more real. However, his teaching considered as a whole, is actually integrated and coherent with a unity that is captured in the following quotation:

"...You have received special graces from God when he led you out of the world and called you to a ministry which has as its sole concern the salvation of souls. Have you consecrated yourselves to God in such a way that you have renounced everything and think of nothing but Him and the duties of your employment. Ensure that this is what you do from now on so as to be properly disposed to duly exercise such a holy ministry" (MF 146,3).

De La Salle emphasizes that the "option of leaving the world" is the result of a call from God and that the Brother "leaves" the world (in the sense of entering a community) not in the sense of a personal retreat, or for purely ascetical motives, but rather to consecrate himself entirely to God in a ministry which has as its sole concern the salvation of souls. Thus the meaning of total renunciation lies in the centrality of God and of this ministry and it is the way of disposing oneself to properly exercise this holy ministry (cf. also MF 191,2).

C. The Brother opts to "abandon" the world and this is one of the given realities of his life. Obedience is also one of the characteristics of his life and it distinguishes him from those who live in the world and enjoy their liberty (MD 7,3). Those who live in community "find themselves in the boat with Jesus and his disciples" (MD 10,1). They opt to live in "lowliness", which is characteristic of their profession and employment, and are conscious that they are humble Brothers, "little known or recognized by people of the world" (MF 86,2). They wear a distinctive habit which enables

seculars to see them as people separated and withdrawn from the world (MH 40).

Consequently, when De La Salle speaks of "separation" from, or "abandonment", of the world he is not indicating to the Brother anything other than the state which they have embraced. These expressions always indicate the nature of the life chosen rather than being an invitation to something different, even when the starting point of these invitations are the biographies of the saints whose style of life have little in common with that of the Brother.

D. In different contexts De La Salle distinguishes the motives which underlie the Brothers' type of life and which explain his "abandonment of the world". Thus, it is explained in terms of the following of Jesus, of total consecration to God, of spiritual preparation for ministry, or from ascetical motivations. The particular emphasis depends on the context in question but one needs to see them as constituting an inseparable unity:

They left the world to follow Jesus and to submit themselves to his direction and to form part of the group of his followers (MD 10,1; MD 59,1); to consecrate themselves to God and to possess his divine Spirit in abundance (MD 42,2; MD 58,1); to lead a life beyond the natural and above human inclinations and to work for the salvation of one's neighbour (MD 58,3; MF 191,1); to die completely to one's passions (MD 76,3); to renounce and to die to what those in the world practise (MD 77,1); to fill oneself with the Spirit of God and of zeal which is necessary to work effectively for the salvation of souls — things which are not found in the world (MF 189,2); "... God has taken you out of the world with the aim of disposing you to acquire the virtue which you require for the faithful undertaking of your employment and to educate many children in the Christian spirit" (MF 131,1).

#### E. *Invitation to thanksgiving*

##### — *Advantages*

De La Salle devotes much effort to enable the Brother to reflectively understand how reasonable and advantageous it is to "withdraw" from the world and he indicates this with the help of numerous examples. It is as if he were saying: "...We have chosen the best type of life in which to exercise the ministry of salvation which God has confided to us". Thus, for example, the Brother lives in



community protected from the waves provoked by the stormy sea of the world, that is, protected from the many occasions in the world of offending God (MD 10,1; EM 46+; MF 89,1); it is a happiness for you to live apart from the world (MD 50,1) numbered among the followers of Jesus (MF 78,1; MF 100,1; MF 174,2); it is "... one of the greatest graces which you have received in your whole life" (MF 182,1) "... the day on which your earthly happiness began" (MF 191,1); one obtains great facility for the practice of virtue and works of piety are practised naturally (MF 98,1); it brings one to self-knowledge which is indispensable for overcoming oneself and for rooting out passions and one's own inclinations (MF 97,2); in an unimaginable way Jesus Christ will love those who have left all for him and will bestow many graces on them as much for themselves as for others. Having their hearts empty of earthly things God will fill them with his Holy Spirit (MF 167,2; MF 171,1. 2; MF 189,2).

### 3.4.2. *The ministerial perspective and the world*

#### A. *An essential perspective*

The ministerial perspective is essential for properly situating and understanding what De La Salle has to say about the world and the Brother since it would be to distort his thought if his teaching were considered purely from an ascetical perspective and disconnected from this ministerial function. De La Salle's perspective is that his teaching is inseparable from the salvific ministry and, consequently, he is not simply concerned with "personal salvation". Every aspect of the Brother's life — his vocation, his experience of the centrality and absoluteness of God, his own sanctification, the meaning of his life — has a ministerial dimension since it stems in some way from his ministerial activity. When De La Salle speaks to the Brother of this abandonment-withdrawal-separation from the world he is not describing the life of a monk or of one who lives alone not even when his reflections stem from a contemplation quite distinct from those of the Brother. Thus, the sense of "not-being-of-the world" is part of the ministry of the Brother:

"Adore God's fatherly providence towards you in leading you out of the world with the aim of disposing you to acquire the virtue which you require for

the faithful fulfilment of your employment and for educating many children in the Christian spirit. Are you responding to God's plans for you? Are you attempting to be so sanctified in your state that you dispose yourselves to sanctify those who have been entrusted to you?" (MF 131,1; cf. also MF 182,3; MD 58,3).

The Brother distances himself from the world to read and to listen to the Sacred Scriptures and to learn from them the way of salvation and the holy maxims which he is obliged to practise and to teach to others by his profession (MF 100,1). Withdrawal from the world produces abundant fruit in souls and attracts abundant graces from God for the good of others (MF 136,1) and it also allows one to be filled by divine love and by the Spirit of God (MF 171,2) as well as by the spirit of faith and of zeal (MF 189,2).

#### B. *In the world to save it*

The Brother is **in the world in order to save it**, as the following quotations indicate: "...The profession which you exercise obliges you to frequent the world daily..." (MD 69,3); "... your employment involves a certain degree of contact with people outside..." (MF 98,2); the Brother is obliged to leave his "retreat" in order to work in the world (MD 6,2).

*To oppose the world is a specific aspect of ministry* which has specific objectives: in order to gain influence in the hearts of pupils at the expense of the "world"; to bring Jesus Christ to life in their hearts; to obtain for them the Christian spirit; to teach them the Gospel maxims and to lead them to practise them. One can see examples of this perspective in the following key texts;

"... God has provided... teachers for children... not only so as not to tolerate... but also to lead them through the dangers of the world..." (MR 197,3).

"...You must pay particular attention to educating them in the Christian spirit which gives them the wisdom of God which is beyond the reach of the princes of this world and which is in open opposition to the spirit and wisdom of the world towards which you must inspire them with a great aversion..." (MR 194,2; cf. also MR 196,2; MD 6,2; MD 44,3).

*From community to the "world" – from the "world" to community?*

A reading of the Lasallian texts often suggests

the image of a "going-and-coming" from the community to the world with a return to the community once the ministerial work has been accomplished. In its essence the thought of De La Salle is very biblical — (see VTB, "Monde III 1, Séparés du monde, témoins du Christ face au monde") but at times his language carries excessive tones of rigorism and of protectionism which gives rise to a suggestion of dualism (cf. MF 127,2; MF 179,1; MD 6,2).

### C. *The world will persecute you*

This biblical perspective (cf. VTB, *ibid*) also often appears in Lasallian teaching and also carries ministerial overtones;

"... Such is the way (cf. Jn 16,2; Jn 17,4) you can expect to be treated while living according to the spirit of your Institute and working to accomplish the good of your neighbour..." (MD 41,1; MF 182,2, 3; MF 136,3; MF 166,3).

### 3.4.3. *To be worthy ministers of the Gospel and not of the world*

The vocation of the Brother involves withdrawal from the world. However, external or physical withdrawal is not sufficient in itself since interior renunciation is also required which implies having "contempt" for it or having an "aversion" for it. What De La Salle demands is consistency and does so in a language which is generally very specific and, at times, very rigorous;

#### A. *Total opposition* (cf. 3.2.3; 3.3.1; 3.3.2)

There is a very strong biblical resonance to this (cf. VTB, "Monde" III.1): "... the habits and views of people in the world are diametrically opposed to those which you must adopt". Consequently, one must not seek to please them in any way (MD 75,2) but rather one must treat the world as an enemy (MD 41,2) opposing it and its maxims (MF 182,1) as well as having "contempt" and an "aversion" for it (cf. Da, Dc, EM, MD, MF and R for that terminology).

#### B. *Additional aspects*

— in imitation of Jesus Christ and the saints one has an aversion and contempt for all that the "blind" world values and energetically pursues — vanities, pleasures, transitory greatness, goods —

(EM 120+; cf. MF 96,2; R 123.11);

— banish from the mind all worldly ideas (MF 125,2; MF 129,1), as well as the worldly spirit and customs (L 16,10.13);

— abhor going into the world and limit contact with it to what is strictly necessary since "contact with the world leads to accepting its spirit" (MF 182,1; cf. L 17,18; 27,9; 31,8 to Gabriel Drolin);

— special attention is given to recreation and to conversations:

"... Since they have withdrawn and separated themselves from the world (religious and those who live in community) their conversation should also be completely different from what those in the world are accustomed to. It would be of little use if they have left the world physically if they have not acquired the spirit which is also opposed to it. This must be manifested particularly in conversation" (MD 30,2; cf. R 50-57), "List of topics of conversation for the Brothers during recreation" especially the introduction to the list which contains value judgements which are very illustrative of the thought of the founder).

### C. *"Those who do not bend the knee before Baal"* (cf. MD 77,3).

That living "in a community withdrawn from the world" does not have a magic effect on individuals is clearly indicated in titles to meditations such as the following: "About those who, while having left the world to live in community, have not rejected its spirit" (MD 76); "Many are called but few are chosen to live in community" (MD 72); "Those who have lost the spirit of their state and the means they must adopt to recover it" (MD 68); "That sanctity does not consist in the habit but rather in good works" (MD 60); "The most grievous abomination in a holy place is sin and relaxation in communities" (MD 77). There are communities in which "God is faithfully served" (MD 77,1) but De La Salle also speaks of the "relaxation of certain other communities" where God "preserves some of the faithful who do not bow the knee before Baal" (MD 77,3). There are many examples such as this which have much to do with the world and relation to it. De La Salle describes some of the aspects which imply the adoption of the worldly spirit such as the lack of attention to prayer, giving scope to one's inclinations and passions (MD 77,1.2), having no other

concern but for the earthly, that is, for the world and for worldly things (MD 68,2; MD 76,1. 2. 3). De La Salle also calls to constancy and to fervour;

"...You have received special graces from God when he led you out of the world and called you to a ministry which has as its sole concern the salvation of souls. Have you consecrated yourselves to God in such a way that you have rejected everything and think only of Him and of the duties of your employment?..." (MF 146,3; cf. MD 60,1; MD 68,3; MF 78,1; MF 97,1; MF 116,3; MF 123,2; MF 137,1; MF 138,1.2; MF 143,1 and 2; MF 144,1; MF 146,3; MF 167,1.2; MF 174,2.3; MF 176,1. 2 +; MF 184,3").

### 3.5. The pupil in the Christian school and in the world

#### 3.5.1. *Positive perspective*

— The existence of the Christian school — its nature, objective and work — has much to do with De La Salle's thinking on the world. With regard to the Christian schools he adopts a positive perspective; "... It is God... in his Providence who has established the Christian schools..."; "... God is so good that... he desires that all come to the knowledge of the truth..."; "... He chose (people) to announce his word to children to enlighten them by making the glory of God known to them..." (MR 193,1 — also title); "... he wishes that all be saved..." (MR 193,2).

— The God who is "so good" is the God of the mystery of salvation which is present in history and in concrete reality. Consequently, De La Salle's personal journey as Founder is closely linked with the events which unfold around him. They are the starting point in the task of discerning the will of God. De La Salle gradually realized that, in the lives of many people, the saving plan of God was far from being realized because the circumstances in which they found themselves left them at the mercy of "the spirit of the world", far from God and lacking knowledge of him. This was a way of living which was in conformity with the maxims of the world and with worldly company. Thus, the Christian school developed precisely as a providential and salvific response to children who were immersed in these worldly experiences; it developed "... to announce his word to children to enlighten them by making the glory of God known to them" (MR 193,1).

— De La Salle makes reference to these experiences in some fundamental texts — such as, for example, MR 193,2; 194,1; RC 1,3-6 — while the personal and charismatic journey of De La Salle profoundly witnessed to the following recommendation which is found in Da 453+, in the context of "those for whom we should pray":

"... Given that those weakest in virtue, those who value the world and those who live according to its maxims — those who have the greatest necessity of help and least able to obtain it — are also those, according to St Augustine, for whom charity impels us to pray with more insistence and fervour".

— The objectives and the work of the Christian school revolve around the "giving of a Christian education", "to inspire Christian maxims" (RC 1,3), "to educate in the Christian spirit which confers the wisdom of God... which is in direct opposition to the spirit and wisdom of the world for which they must inspire their pupils with great horror" (MR 194,2). In the context of the symbol of the angel, the teacher is "an excellent guide" for the children leading them safely "through the dangers of the world" (MR 197,3; cf. above 3.4.2).

#### 3.5.2. *To live in the world without being of the world*

De La Salle invites the pupil of the Christian school to embrace the saving plan of God living the Christian spirit by being in the world without being of the world.

To do this;

A. *He taught them what they should believe:* the creative intervention of God, the original state of happiness of the first man, his sin and its consequences, the coming of the Son of God into the world, salvation for all, the gift of the Spirit which inspired the foundation of the Church, the Church "militant" opposing "the world, the flesh and the devil" to secure salvation, the joyful destiny of eternally seeing, loving and being with God (Cf. Db: CL 21).

B. *He taught them what they should do* which is summarized in the love of God and of one's neighbour. De La Salle insists on the total and absolute character of charity or the love of God.

Thus, "... to love God above all things is to love him more than one loves anything and more than all there is in the world" (Db 74). The commandments focus the direction of charity indicating the good that God demands and the sin which must be avoided. One must practise the virtues and to do so one must make use of the necessary means which is the grace of God, which is essential from all points of view. To obtain this it is necessary to make use of the sacraments and of prayer. De La Salle develops this in greater detail in Db. Thus, for example,

— Baptism entails an option for God. It implies a renunciation of the devil and his temptations as well as his pomps — (ie. the maxims and vanities of the world) — and his works (the pleasures of the flesh and of the senses). It involves living as true children of God and not according to the world (Db 164).

— Confirmation makes one a perfect Christian, giving one the strength and the courage in the world to profess the faith and maxims of Jesus Christ by word and deed without any human respect (Db 166+).

— The sacrament of Penance allows the pupil to compare the way he is living his life against his option for God to straighten out his life (Db 180-184).

— The Eucharist provides him with spiritual nourishment and an increase in grace (Db 208+).

— Through prayer he draws on the blessings and the grace of God. It enables him to experience the mercy of God as well as overcoming temptations, detaching himself from the world and uniting himself to God (Db 249+).

The overall tone of Lasallian teaching and catechesis in Da and Db is very positive. It is an invitation to the pupil to live the Christian spirit and to live in the world without being of the world (cf. FERNANDEZ MAGAZ, M., "Un gran catecismo del gran siglo francés: Los deberes del Cristiano de San Juan Bautista de La Salle", Madrid, 1968; cf. also PUNGIER, J., "Jean-Baptiste de La Salle: Le message de son Catéchisme", Rome, 1984).

C. In Dc (the third part of the "Duties of the Christian") the Founder reiterates *suggestions* which have much to do with the vision and behaviour of *the pupil in relation to the world*:

— Above all he reiterates the positive and redemptive view of the world (cf. Dc pp. 27-20, 57+, 60-64, 69-71, 90+, 93-95, 134+, 151+) even though it is sinful (Dc 72) and that the world

rejected Jesus Christ, the corner stone (Dc 59).

— His catechesis on the liturgical seasons also refers to relations with the world; a rejection of the spirit and the behaviour of the world, including activities which are permitted (Septuagesima: Dc 73+); severe recommendations with regard to carnival weeks — "the Devil's Lent" (Dc 75-84); avoiding bad companions and undertaking mortifications (Lent: Dc 85, 92); aspiring to heaven and to a total abandonment of sin (Easter: Dc 94-95); avoiding the company of the worldly and the libertine; attaching oneself only to God and renouncing the pleasures of the world (Ascension, Pentecost: Dc 97); an attitude of gratitude towards God for the goods of the earth along with a sense of detachment and moderation in their use (Rogation days in September: Dc 106+).

— His catechesis on the many feasts to honour God, the mysteries of Jesus, the Most Blessed Virgin and the Saints gave De La Salle the opportunity to allude to the type of behaviour which, in his judgement, should characterize the life of a pupil of the Christian school. Taken overall it presents a very exacting picture; the pupil should not profane Sunday with games, dances or shows (Dc 129); should not frequent company (Holy Trinity: Dc 232); should love suffering and poverty (Christmas: Dc 142); should circumcise his heart in particular with regard to attachments to the pleasures of the senses (Dc 145); he should undergo a spiritual resurrection involving, among other things, separating himself from the company of those who live according to the vanities and pleasures of the world as well as seeking the things of heaven (Easter: Dc 173); he should have a great contempt for the things of the world as well as renouncing those things which please the senses (All Saints: Dc 216) — cf. also Dc 148 (Epiphany); Dc 161 (Palm Sunday); Dc 176 (Ascension); Dc 210 (Assumption); Dc 265 (St Matthew); Dc 268 (St Mathias); Dc 293 (St Nicholas); Dc 295 (Patronal feasts).

D. Some of the texts which the pupils had to recite also indicated attitudes which were in opposition to the world; thus, for example, "... I will not blush in observing how the word which you teach us is so opposed to the maxims of the world" (I 78); or ... "I do not wish to offend you even if, through it, I were to gain the whole

world" (I 183); or, again, a "... prayer to ask God for a horror of the goods, honours and pleasures of the world..." (I 189-190) — cf. the catechesis on the ordinary as well as the most important means for avoiding sin (I 162, 4<sup>o</sup> and 5<sup>o</sup>).

### 3.5.3. *The citizen of the world – a Christian perspective*

A. The quotations in the section above indicate the extent to which De La Salle shared a rigorist vision of the world and this could create the impression that the ideal for the pupil of the Christian school would be to live distant from, and unconcerned by, the world. However, in reality, this is not the vision of De La Salle. His schools evolved precisely as a response to his awareness of the situation of the poor. The means of salvation were most distant from the poor parents who had neither the time nor the means to educate their children properly (RC 1,4; MR 193,2; MR 194,1) and it was the Christian school which made these means available through religious and secular education (CE 97, 102). These schools were consistent in the pursuit of true human values (cf. GALLEGU, S., Vol 2, 32; CAMPOS, M., I, 205-209) which took place in an educational framework within a Christian environment and which had the clear objective of providing a Christian education (RC 1). It was an education which took seriously both the reality of the pupil and the reality of the kingdom of God and there were appropriate means to capture both perspectives. Thus, for example, "secular" education was not a "pretext" to conduct religious teaching or to lead the pupils to the Church:

"... In the Christian schools... throughout the whole day, the pupils learn to read and write as well as learning their religion... they are permanently occupied. In this way they will be prepared for work when their parents so wish it..." (MR 194,1).

"... In your employment your zeal for the good of the Church must be accompanied with a zeal for the good of the State. Your pupils are already citizens of the State and they will have to act accordingly some day. You will procure the good of the Church in making them good Christians, docile to the truths of faith and to the maxims of the holy Gospel. You will procure the good of the State in teaching them to read and to write and all that pertains to the present life in your ministry. Piety must be linked to human formation since without the latter your work would be ineffective (MF 160,3; cf. also MF 91,3;

MR 205,3; MR 206,1).

B. The "Management of Schools" and the "Rules of Christian Politeness" are indications of the seriousness with which De La Salle was concerned both with the world and with the reign of God.

Everything that was done in the school from morning until night (CE P1), the means adopted by the teacher to establish and maintain order in the school (CE P2), the tasks involved in the administration of the school and in the formation of the new teachers (CE P3), indicate the extent to which the Christian school concentrated on reading, writing, spelling, arithmetic and the teaching of the catechism as well as indicating the importance given to the learning process, to valuing the person, to the influences which impinged on the pupil, to the human dimension, apparent on numerous occasions, and to a realistic preparation for the future.

Through the "Rules of Christian Politeness" one can see the interest which De La Salle had in promoting well-mannered behaviour in the pupil. The scope is all-embracing treating such aspects as, for example, the body, getting up and going to bed, dressing, meals, entertainments, visits, conversations, relationships, in the street, on journey, and is accompanied with precise details which seek to be up-to-date and adapted to times and places. At the same time the intention is to go beyond motivation proper to a worldly spirit so as to aspire to behaviour inspired by Gospel motives (cf. RB Preface).

## 4. THE EXPERIENCE OF THE FIRST COMMUNITIES OF THE BROTHERS WITH REGARD TO THE WORLD

### 4.1. *At one and the same time immersed in the world and distant from it*

The vocation of the Brother evolved slowly and progressively in the same way as De La Salle's own vocation evolved. Both he and the early teachers embarked on a way of life which became gradually more and more inspired by the Gospel (cf. CAMPOS, M., I, 108+, 154+).

From the short community experience of Holy Week in 1681, which was prolonged later in the De La Salle family home (GALLEGO, S., Vol 1, 150), a real experience of community life began to emerge (CAMPOS, M., 1, 113). From that time on, and especially in the house on the Rue Neuve, "... in an area away from the hustle and the concerns of the world..." (Blain, 1, 224), the teacher's house began to "take on the form of a real community" (CAMPOS, M., 1, 113). Already, in embryonic form, it was a style of life which sought to be in harmony with the values and the demands of the Gospel.

From the beginning the "world" was present in De La Salle's option to leave "his" world in order to enter the world of the teachers to live "as one of them" (GALLEGO, S., Vol 1, 157). For the teachers the "world" was present in their option to leave aside desires for social promotion in order to gradually embrace a world of Gospel demands. Together they were to evangelize each other and to gradually create a new way of life which, at one and the same time, was "distant from the world", from worldly criteria, and also "immersed in the real and difficult world" of the poor. It was not a monastic community despite the appearances of fixed timetables, long prayer, involvement in the work of the house, detachment from everything, humility, poor clothing and shoes, fasting — it was their own world (BER 62; GALLEGO, S., Vol 1, 157). It was a community *sui generis* in the process of mutual evangelization and progressive detachment from worldly criteria and style in order to be more effective instruments of evangelization for the children of the working-class and the poor.

This evangelization involved significant renunciations for De La Salle in the shape of his canonry (GALLEGO, S., Vol 1, 160-165) and his wealth (cf. *ibid.*, 171-176; also a detailed commentary in CAMPOS, M., 1, 119-144), renunciations which reflect his incarnational journey which was a journey of detachment and of salvation of others, completely given over to Christ. For the Brothers it involved a continual purification of their Gospel attitudes on which was to depend the apostolic efficacy of the school. The structure of community life also continued to evolve — it was a community which wished to situate itself in the world in a particular way with the aim of provid-

ing a true Christian education for the children of the working-class and of the poor. It was a style of life which was, at one and the same time, a "being in" the world and a "withdrawal from" it.

The organization of community life, along with reflection on that life and on the demands inherent in it, as well as the discernment of God's will by De La Salle and the Brothers (eg. in the Assemblies) was to crystallize first in regulations and then in Rules to guarantee an effective way of being in the world of the poor as instruments of salvation. These Rules were to promote;

- gratuity which would allow the poor access to the Christian school (RC 1,1)
- the experience of the spirit of the Institute (faith and ardent zeal) "which should be the motive of all their conduct" (RC 2)
- the teaching which they were to give to the pupils and the method of giving it (RC 1. 7. 8. 9)
- close association and a close spirit of community (RC 3)
- mutual union (RC 13) and obedience (RC 12)
- a great love of the holy exercise of mental prayer and of holy communion (RC 4).

The regulations, and later the Rules, also indicated the way to "withdraw from the world". In particular, it involved;

- renouncing the "worldly person" and the "spirit of the world" and hence the emphasis on the exercises of humiliation and mortification (RC 5)
- the way of conducting oneself in recreations (RC 6)
- conduct with people outside the community (RC 14) and while on journeys (RC 24)
- the prescriptions with regard to modesty (RC 21).

To our way of thinking to-day many of these prescriptions would destroy relationships but for De La Salle the emphasis was different. He was concerned to indicate "reserve with people of the world so as not to slip back into the spirit of the world" (RC 16,1).

#### 4.2. An object of persecution for the people of the world

De La Salle often warns his Brothers that they will be the object of persecution for the people of the world (cf. 3.4.2). Behind this is the Johannine teaching on the opposition and rejection by the world of Jesus, the Son of God. However, it is also

a specific allusion to the foundation of the Institute in which a hostile world had persistently and fiercely opposed this "work of God".

It would be necessary to read many Lasallian texts referring to this theme in parallel with the negative way in which the "spirit of the world" viewed the good which the Christian school accomplished and, in consequence, the way in which it opposed it with all the means within reach. Underlying these observations of De La Salle is the distant memory of the first opposition which he himself suffered in the bosom of his own family, and from his relatives, when he brought the teachers into his own home (cf. BLAIN 1, 175; BER 42+; MAC 19+; MAR 29+) as well as that which arose with regard to the habit of the Brothers, in Rheims (BER 69; BLAIN, Vol 1, 238-240; Vol 2, 255, 380, 403) and in Paris (cf. all on the "Memoir on the Habit" - cf. GALLEGU, S., Vol 1, 221-225). There was also the underlying memory of the repeated surreptitious attacks on the free schools by the Little Schools of Paris in 1690 (cf. GALLEGU, S., Vol 1, 228-230) and in 1698 (*ibid.*, 307+) while 1704 was the year in which they suffered the violence of the writing masters (*ibid.* 372-376) which continued in litigation until 1706 (*ibid.*, 408-414; cf. BLAIN, Vol 1, 388; Vol 2, 357). All of this, too, without mentioning other mindless and manipulative opposition directed against the person of De La Salle in 1702 (*ibid.*, 355-370) or which was stirred up against him by the lawsuit with Clément (*ibid.*, 432-36; 468-70; 472; 477-480).

#### 4.3. The attraction of the spirit of the world

"... lest one become imbued with their spirit for which the devil gives most religious a natural inclination, causing them to form attachments when they communicate freely and frequently with such persons..." (RC 16,1).

We noted elsewhere (3.4.3C) that the repeated warning of De La Salle with regard to reserve with the world had much to do with the early experience of the new foundation. Consequently, ascetical recommendations and historical experience most certainly interplayed on each other. It is, perhaps, from this perspective that one can read some of the events narrated by Blain (cf. 2, 478); or the example of the Brother from Versailles, who found

the school in 1710, whose heart remained attached to the spirit of the world in his frequent contact with the Court and who left the Institute, (2, 66-69, 306); or the three Brothers from Mende who slipped into a life of ease and sensuality which led them into grave disorders (2, 48+) from which not even the proximity of De La Salle could divert them — Blain himself has some very harsh words for them (2, 48+). These events reinforced De La Salle's conviction that "those who adopt the spirit of the world lose the spirit of their state" (BLAIN, 2, 51+). The same theme is reiterated in the biographies in their accounts of De La Salle's advice to his Brothers before he died;

"... If you wish to persevere and to die in your state do not have any contact with people of the world; ... if not... you would grow fond of their way of acting... to please them you fall into infidelity with regard to your rules... you would grow to dislike your state and eventually you would abandon it..." (MAC 162; MAR 296+; BLAIN 2, 174).

#### 5. CONTEMPT OF THE WORLD IN THE TIME OF DE LA SALLE

##### 5.1. "Contempt" as a constant feature

In his vision of the world and the relations which one should have with it, De La Salle shows himself to be both severe and rigorist and in this he was responding to the sensibility of his time. According to Cognet, contempt for the world was certainly a constant in the time of De La Salle (cf. COGNET, L., "La spiritualité française au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle, Paris, 1949). It was an era strongly influenced by moral pessimism which sprung from a very negative vision of human nature. It was a theme which was to figure prominently in the controversy provoked by Jansenism in the great debate over grace and human liberty. According to Gallego, "... the anthropology underlying dogma, grace, morality and sacraments of this time... is negative, lamentable; one has to say it, unacceptable"; "the opposition "spirit-flesh", the use of the senses, the theology of pleasure, flight from the world, penance, mortification... are presented in markedly pessimistic and rigorist tones and De La Salle was affected by this..." (GALLEGU, S., Vol 2,

55-57; PUNIER, J., "Jean-Baptiste de La Salle: le message de son catéchisme", 110-130; «Les Dévoirs II, témoins d'une sensibilité religieuse typique du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle française», in VAN LOO, E., "Le mépris du monde chez saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle", 31-50; "L'homme chez SJBS", 74-77; "Enfant de son temps"; in DEVILLE, R., "L'École française de spiritualité", 173-175: "Le pessimisme de l'École française").

## 5.2. De La Salle's concern and a modern perspective

The theme of the world and relations with it often appears in the works of De La Salle and often does so under the heading of "contempt" for the world. From our cultural perspective, which places such a high value on man and on his capacities and which has led to the development of a theology of earthly realities — to a political theology, to the theology of liberation — it appears that De La Salle's treatment of this theme is too harsh. From our perspective it appears strange, not to say contradictory, that De La Salle places such insistence on withdrawal, separation, renunciation, contempt, aversion, on being at "war" with the world. He himself was so involved in "secular business" — in the context of family responsibilities which he had to take on while still young (and with what distinction! cf. AROZ, CL 28-31.42) following the death of his parents — and in other administrative business such as obtaining legal recognition for the Sisters of the Infant Jesus in Rheims (cf. AROZ, CL 38), the creation and consolidation of the Christian schools in many different places, the defence of the schools against those who opposed them, the establishment on three occasions of a Training College for rural teachers, the foundation of the community of Brothers (a vocation which emerged from concrete necessities at the service of a Christian school for life, a school which was serving society through the service of children of the working-class and the poor). He also had many other administrative activities involving the publication of his writings, contacts with parish priests, bishops, dignitaries, municipalities, parliaments. Yet, despite all this, the observations of De La Salle on the world and relations with it suggest a pessimistic and rigorist

reading of it which almost amounts to a dualistic interpretation of reality.

In his defence one would have to say that the preoccupations underlying his treatment are not ours. We are more concerned with an anthropological or philosophical framework on which man's relationship with the world can be appropriately situated. The works of De La Salle are not philosophical, nor even strictly theological; rather they are catechetical, educational, spiritual and ascetical. Our perspective is more general than his — we are more concerned with "Man" and with the "World" whereas De La Salle was more concerned with "THIS" man and "THIS" world. He was not concerned specifically with "man in himself". When De La Salle speaks of "contempt" of the world he is not adopting a position of speculative disparagement. He focuses on the real world and on the moral order which holds. Thus, he is not reflecting on creation as such but rather on the evil which has tarnished the created. He does not focus on the theme of earthly realities but rather on the way in which they have deviated from the centrality of the will of God and from Gospel maxims. His written work echoes, in an undoubtedly over-emphasized way, the Johannine opposition of "light and darkness" and the Pauline contrast between the "new creature: things of heaven" and "things of earth" as well as the medieval monastic tradition of "contemptus mundi" and the Berullian emphasis on the greatness of God and the radical abnegation of the self or the destruction of the creature.

De La Salle's teaching on the world and relations with it is not just confined to his specific teaching on the theme since it can also be seen in his ministerial perspective as, for example, in the following; that the school functions well, that it forms the "perfect man", that it is a realistic preparation for life, that the pupil lives well and that he studies what will be useful both to himself and to society and the State here below. Thus, it was important for De La Salle that what was being offered in all this was not only a "philosophical perspective", which spoke of transitory man and the spirit of the world, but also a rather more elevated faith-vision of the resurrected man of Easter guided by the Spirit of God.

In this connection, too, it would be worth ap-



plying the opportune observation of Jean Leclercq (referring, in his case, to the spirituality of the Middle Ages); "...The contempt of the world is no more than a part of a whole vision from which it cannot be isolated and in which its true value can be seen" (RAM, 41 (1965) 287). It would also be important

to refer to the "historical dynamism" which the intuitions and the work of De La Salle have contributed to such modern realities as faith in the perfectibility of man (De La Salle would have spoken of the "fruits" of the Christian schools) as well as to the school itself with all its educational dimensions.

### Complementary themes:

Artisans; Brother's dress; Christian; Christian teacher; Conversation; Example-Edification; Guardian Angels; Ministry; Renunciation-Detachment; Retreat; Salvation; School; Spirit of Christianity; Spirit of the World.

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